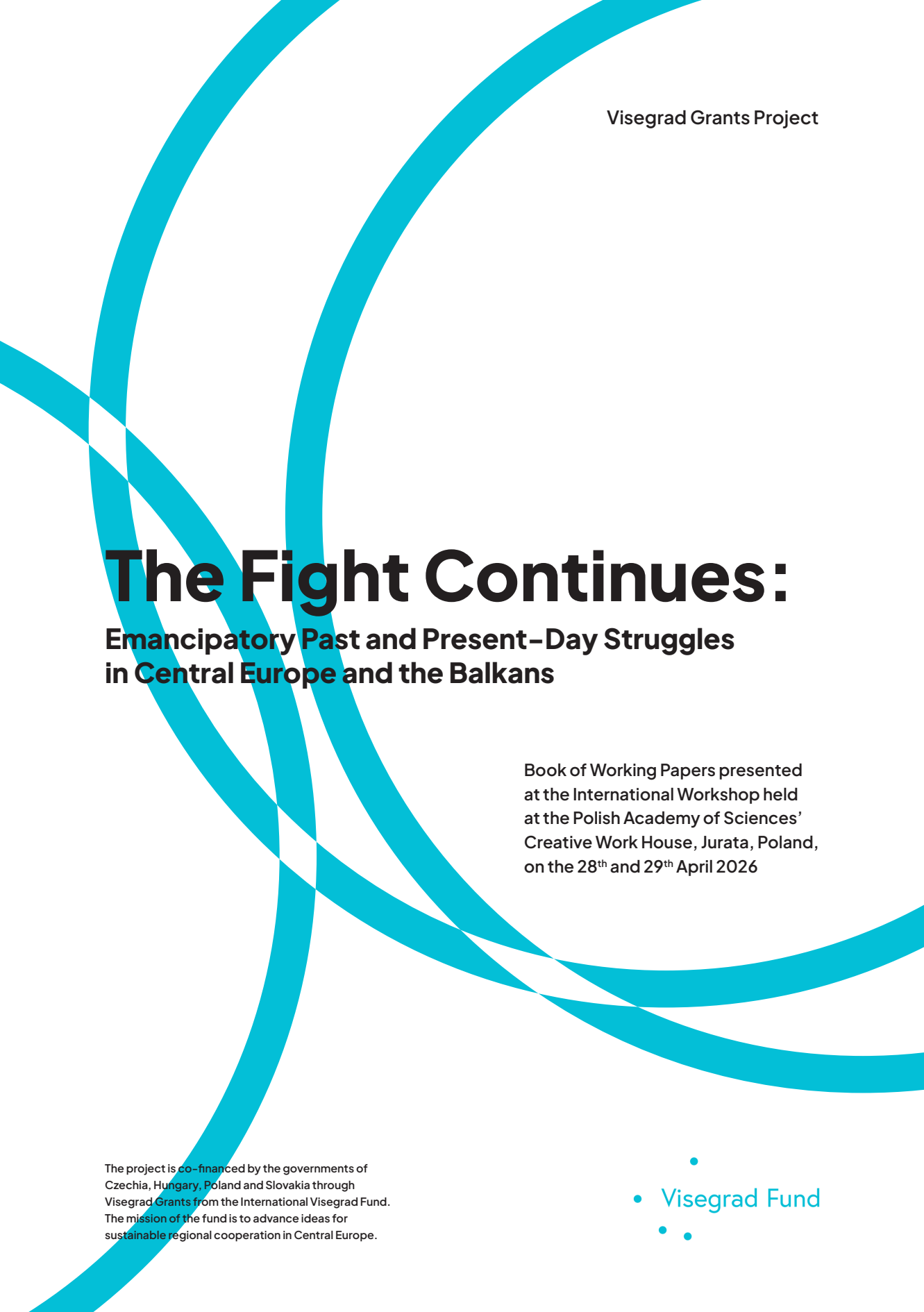




Visegrad Grants Project

The Fight Continues:

**Emancipatory Past and Present-Day Struggles
in Central Europe and the Balkans**

Book of Working Papers presented
at the International Workshop held
at the Polish Academy of Sciences'
Creative Work House, Jurata, Poland,
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sustainable regional cooperation in Central Europe.



Program of the Workshop

28 APRIL 2026

- 10:00–10:50** **Karolina Jesień:** *What makes up a world-event? Walter Benjamin's internationalism in the face of World War I*
- 11:05–11:55** **Srđan Đurović:** *The Spectre of Emancipation on the European Semi-Periphery: Gajo Petrović and the Thought of Revolution*
- 12:10–13:00** **Krzysztof Katkowski:** *Minor Internationalism? Or how to introduce the concept*
- 14:30–15:20** **Mark Losoncz:** *G. M. Tamás and the Genesis of the (Missing) East European Emancipation*
- 15:35–16:25** **Sára Bagdi:** *Storm above Shanghai: The representation of Chinese workers on the pages of the periodical 100% and its relevance to Hungarian workers' culture in the interwar period*
- 16:40–17:20** **Jan Sowa:** *From 1956 to 1980: „Solidarity” as an autonomous workers' self-organization*

Specialist discussant for papers: **Joseph Grim Feinberg**

29 APRIL 2026

- 9:40–12:15** **Panel discussion:** *Interstitial Subjectivities: Care, Pedagogy, and Resistance in Post-Socialist Capitalist Contexts*
Aleksandra Hołubowicz: *Interstitial Pedagogies*
Michaela Pixová: *Care, Emancipation, and Post-Socialist Legacies: New Civic Collectives in Czechia*
Barbara Dynda: *Kinship Beyond Blood Ties: Queer and Trans Families of Choice in Poland*
Adam Lipszyc: *Beautiful Horror, Terrible Love: New Forms of Subjectivity in Contemporary Polish Prose as the Reverse Side of the Social Struggle*
Magdalena Grabowska (chair): *Feminist protests, backlash and political economy: perspective of social reproduction theory*
Marta Szpala: *Strategies of Survival: Women's Agency and Framing Struggles in Serbia's Environmental Movements*

14:00–14:50 **Marjan Ivković:** *Inductive emancipation: the unrealized promise of Yugoslav self-management in Serbia's student movement*

15:05–15:55 **André Thieman:** *Raspberry mobilizations: workers' self-management as a resource for social struggles*

16:10–17:00 **Mikołaj Ratajczak:** *The Dialectics of Multitude: How to Articulate the Contradictions of Current Wave of Social Protests?*

17:15–18:15 **The Fight Continues: Brainstorming and Networking in SubGroups**

Specialist discussants for the panel and micropapers:
Tijana Matijević and **Barbara Barysz**

What makes up world-history? Walter Benjamin's internationalism in the face of World War I (draft)¹

In 1938, in the face of a renewed threat of a "world war", when the German Anschluss of Austria was followed by the forced breakup of Czechoslovakia, Walter Benjamin indirectly voiced his disagreement with the idea that the global aspect of world history be defined by military conflict in a short note dedicated to his favourite science fiction writer. "Here is the beginning of the article as it is engraved in my memory" – he writes and goes on to closely paraphrase Scheerbart's text, over two decades after he had read it. The idea that stuck with Benjamin for so long was simple: no war can ever be considered a world event, because no war can ever be compared to the scale and intricacy that the word *world* conveys. "I protest first of all", writes Scheerbart in 1914, as reported by Benjamin, "against the expression 'world war'. I am certain that no star, however close, will interfere in the matter in which we are involved. Everything suggests that a profound peace continues to hover over the stellar universe".² With all the power of scale that a peaceful image of the cosmos conveys, there is a level of naïveté that Scheerbart's call for cosmic peace in the face of a looming military conflict carries. The intradiegetic narrator in Scheerbart's piece, whose lecture is its main content – Professor Großleben – starts off by downplaying the technological advancement of military technology, compared to the scale of cosmic eruptions. "What is a shot from a 42 centimeter gun compared to a single solar prominence, which in a couple of minutes is hurled upwards by 10 000 miles!" – he exclaims.³ In his astronomically conceived ac-

1 This is an early draft of an argument I develop in an essay for *Contradictions* 1–2/2026. A more extensive paper is in the making.

2 Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften: Aufsätze, Essays, Vorträge*, II, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Suhrkamp, 1991), 630.

3 Paul Scheerbart, 'Professor Großleben über den Weltkrieg', *Zeit-Echo* 1, no. 4 (1914): 44–46. My translation. Scheerbart refers to the Gamma- and M-Gerät howitzers – the biggest siege guns ever fielded at the time, weighing up to 150 tonnes with 42cm caliber. Fully assembled, a Gamma-Gerät was over 4 meters high and over 13 meters long. See: Romanych, Marc & Rupp, Martin (2013). 42cm "Big Bertha" and German Siege Artillery of World War I., p. 12.

count of history – where predicting political events is compared to weather forecast – Großleben points to the “periods of sun spots” (*Sonnenflecken-perioden*). But behind a seemingly determinist understanding of history, guided by objective forces of nature, is a story of revolutionary struggle. The dates Scheerbart chooses for these key moments in true *world* history are far from random. The French Revolution (1789), the Spring of Nations (1848), the Paris Commune (1870/71), the revolutions of 1905 (1904/5) were all marked by a “maximum of sun spot”. “We had to count for a big spike in 1915” – he concludes, alluding to the eleven-year periods of *Sonnenflecken* he suggests could be recurrently observed since the end of the 18th century.⁴ If the calculations in Scheerbart’s text are veiled in astrological determinism, they were more or less correct in predicting the next revolutionary wave that would sweep through Europe and beyond after 1917 – twelve years after the revolutions of 1905.⁵

This paper aims to showcase how Benjamin, writing during and a few years after World War I, reimagined world-history from the vantage point of planetary wholeness rather than interstate conflict. Following Scheerbart, Benjamin’s early writings developed the idea that war does not make world-history – revolutions do. In what follows, I aim to stage a set of tensions this position entailed for Benjamin: between war and revolution, cosmos and earth, nationalism and internationalism, and between the solitary body of *Körper* and the historical, collective body of *Leib*. As we will see, Benjamin’s understanding of what the planetary perspective of the *world* means for history undergoes an important shift at the turn of the 1920s, negotiating the figure of humankind he wagered against the events and idea of World War I with a workers-centred understanding of the internationalist

4 Scheerbart, ‘Professor Großleben über den Weltkrieg’, 44. Most probably, Scheerbart refers here to the swiss astronomer Rudolf Wolf’s mid-19th century meteorological and astronomic observations on sun spots, through which he distinguished 11-year long periods of sun spots, which overlapped with the fluctuations of the Earth’s magnetic field. The results of this research were presented in: Wolf, Rudolf. *Die Sonne und ihre Flecken: Ein Vortrag Vor gemischtem Publikum gehalten am 10. Januar 1861*. Forgotten Books, 2017. The Russian-German Wladimir Köppen meteorologist and climatologist developed these observations into a theory about the influence of sun spot periods on temperature fluctuations.

5 From the Spartakus Uprising and Bavarian Republic in Germany to Finland’s civil war, Italy’s “Biennio Rosso”, Hungarian Soviet Republic, the closely tied Slovak Soviet Republic and, beyond Europe, the Persian Socialist Soviet Republic.

struggle for revolution. The following exposition of this shift aims to offer an insight into a specific lens on internationalism written from within the short period of a revolutionary window in Europe – after the 1917 revolution and before the failure of the 1923 German Revolution fully set in. As I aim to show, Benjamin's vocabulary at the turn of the 1920s, influenced by Scheerbart's response to the idea of a world war, operates with a concept of the world as a necessarily emancipatory term, connoting a scale of social organisation that by definition could only be peaceful.

As the war initially advertised as a *Blitzkrieg* dragged on, Benjamin turned to read Immanuel Kant's writings on perpetual peace and cosmopolitanism, where Kant proposed preliminary measures to prevent future wars and painted a vision of international politics guided by peace.⁶ Young Benjamin was dissatisfied with the philosophy of history he found there.⁷ In a laconic sketch of a response to Kant's ideas on cosmopolitanism, and to his debate with Herder over the "goal" of human history (cultural growth, according to Herder, or development of reason, according to Kant), Benjamin works out his own ideas on how world-history should be conceived. Echoing Scheerbart's inter-planetary perspective, in which human history was juxtaposed with cosmic events, Benjamin's short sketch proposes that "the earth is, in itself, a world-historical individuum".⁸

The idea of world-history Benjamin writes within and argues against is distinctly German – and has to be placed within the convergence of its understanding as the history of the states with the new post-imperial geopolitical order that emerged after 1918. In the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Hegel famously introduced the notion of *Weltgeschichte* in a final section on "The State", defining it as "the necessary development, (...) of the self-consciousness and freedom of mind".⁹ As Hegel elaborates later in the

6 Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften. Nachträge*, VII, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Suhrkamp, 1991), 438.

7 Walter Benjamin, *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910–1940*, ed. Gershom Scholem and Theodor W. Adorno, trans. Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson (1978; University of Chicago Press, 2012), 105.

8 Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings, 1913–1926*, vol. 1, ed. Marcus Paul Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 115. Translation amended.

9 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right. The Philosophy of History*, trans. Thomas Malcolm Knox and John Sibree (Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1952), 110.

"Philosophy of World-History" from 1830/31, the distinct stage of development of the "objective spirit" he calls world-history appears only with the emergence of the state, because the external existence of the state, with its rational laws and customs, requires the consciousness of the past for its integration.¹⁰ In the face of the Great War, this Hegelian notion of world history – as history of the states – gained new currency, and a new national twist. In Oswald Spengler's *Untergang des Abendlandes*, which became an immediate bestseller in 1918, *Weltgeschichte* started to connote a post-Darwinist (influenced by Ernst Haeckel rather than Charles Darwin himself) conception of nations as actors in a battle for survival.¹¹ For Spengler, world-history was less concerned with the progress, or even civilisational decline, of states, than with a biography of the great, individual cultures, each developing in isolation according to its own internal logic, conditioned by its landscape.¹² The main historical actor was the eternal figure of the people, with its rural ideal form found in peasantry, binding eternal blood to eternal land. Notably, the latter famous phrase introduced in Spengler's *Untergang* was to serve as a motto to Wilhelm Darré in his 1930 novel (*The New Nobility of Blood and Soil*, 1930), and in 1934 when, as the NSDAP Minister of Agriculture, he backed up Germany's claim to territories in the East it lost in the 1918 Brest-Litovsk treaty.¹³

Against this background, Benjamin's cosmic perspective on world history developed out of a deep disagreement with the initial antipacifist sentiments spread among many liberal intellectuals, under whose influence he developed the starting point of his critical views of capitalism (Max Weber), and patriotism (Gustav Wyneken).¹⁴ The experiences of World War I, inclu-

10 Tim Rojek, *Hegels Begriff der Weltgeschichte: Eine wissenschaftstheoretische Studie* (De Gruyter, 2017).

11 Dylan Pammer, 'Spengler's Deconstruction of Darwinism', *Philosophical Journal of Conflict and Violence* 7, no. 1 (2023): 87–114.

12 Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, ed. Arthur Helps, trans. Charles Francis Atkinson (Oxford University Press, 1991).

13 Cornelia Schmitz-Berning, *Vokabular des Nationalsozialismus* (1998; De Gruyter, 2000), 110–14; Anna Bramwell, *Blood and Soil: Richard Walther Darré and Hitler's 'Green Party.'* (Kensal Press, 1985), 54–74.

14 Sarah Posman et al., eds, *The Intellectual Response to the First World War: How the Conflict Impacted on Ideas, Methods and Fields of Enquiry* (Sussex Academic Press, 2017); Nicolas De Warren, *German Philosophy and the First World War*, 1st edn (Cambridge University Press, 2023),

ding internal splits around the issues of pacifism within the Free German Youth movement, of which Benjamin was an engaged but often critical part, have put an unbridgeable distance between Benjamin's thoughts on communitarianism and his own past.¹⁵ At the beginning of the 1920s Benjamin turns to the idea of an extensive, collective "body of humankind" – instead of searching for a form of collectivity alternative to those based on family ties and nationhood in youth organisations and in student life he wrote about in 1913. In a 1922-23 anthropological sketch, "Outline of the Psychophysical Problem", Benjamin offers a differentiation between two aspects of the human body, specific to the German language. *Körper*, which for Benjamin denotes the solitary aspect of our bodily constitution, connects us to God and signifies our bodies as substance.¹⁶ It is marked by decay, but it is also outside of history. The decaying properties of our body are eternal, its substance marked by solitude, which "will not be destroyed – even in death".¹⁷ *Leib*, on the other hand, denotes that aspect of our bodies which "dwells in history" – and, as such, tends towards a collective form. But – and this is where Benjamin's understanding of human collectivity enters a planetary perspective in more than just a sense of unlimited scale – Benjamin's *Leib* extends beyond the individual, drawing "nature, the nonliving, plant, and animal, into this life of the body of mankind".¹⁸ For Benjamin at the turn of the 1920s, it was the earth as a whole, or later humankind as a whole, linked to the environment as part of its limbs (as the "Outline" defined *Leib*), that constituted the subject of history.

Implicitly, then, Benjamin's early anthropology offers an internationalist counter to the nationalist conception of environmental wholeness. In 1915, Benjamin got a significant present from Gershom Scholem – at the time, a participant in clandestine pacifist meetings organised around Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. Luxemburg's text in her and Franz Meh-

<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108526180>.

15 Natasha Hay, 'Lessons of 1914: Reconceiving the Free School Community Out of the Actuality of War', *Community in Walter Benjamin's Philosophy*, 7 March 2025, 55–82; Markus Hennig, 'Idea and Experience of Community in the Writings of the Young Walter Benjamin', *Community in Walter Benjamin's Philosophy*, 7 March 2025, 3–23.

16 Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 1:394.

17 Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 1:395.

18 Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 1:395.

ring's first issue of *Die Internationale. Zeitschrift für Praxis und Theorie des Marxismus* made a striking impression on young Benjamin.¹⁹ It was a loud denouncement of the German Social Democratic Party's (SPD) support for the German military mobilisation as a "conceding victory to imperialism without a fight" and assuming "a crucial historical role: that of imperialism's squire".²⁰ Although Benjamin never joined the reading group, the text left a distinct flavour to his political development after 1918, ridden with an unrelenting hatred of everything Social Democratic, and a distinctly internationalist tone to his pacifism. In 1927, Benjamin repeats the Scheerbarthian gesture of decentring the First World War from world events, now in regard to his own biography. Writing an introduction to a planned series of essays for the French Communist Party's journal *L'Humanité: Journal Socialiste*, he writes that "the revolution of 1918, which was defeated by the petty-bourgeois, parvenu spirit of German Social Democracy, did more to radicalize this [meaning his own] generation than did the war itself".²¹ In fact, however, it was not until mid-1920s that Benjamin's idea of planetary wholeness as an alternative to imperial world politics embraced the perspective of class struggle, when Benjamin presents the war itself as part of a series of convulsions shaking the newly emerged body of humankind.

In the war, he writes in "To the Planetarium", written between 1923-26, "the frame of mankind was shaken by a feeling that resembled the bliss of the epileptic".²² The focus quickly shifts to the revolutionary wave that swept across Europe after 1918. The "revolts that followed", Benjamin writes, "were the first attempt of mankind to bring the new body under [humankind's] control. The power of the proletariat is the measure of its convalescence".²³ Yet even though these militant words catch up with Benjamin's later stylisation of his biography, they sound rather asynchronous with their own historical index. The year when Benjamin started his work

19 Esther Leslie, *Walter Benjamin* (Reaktion, 2007), 33.

20 Rosa Luxemburg, 'Der Wiederaufbau Der Internationale', *Die Internationale. Zeitschrift Für Praxis Und Theorie Des Marxismus* (Frankfurt am Main) 1 (1971): 4, my translation.

21 Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings, 1927–1930*, 2.1, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 20.

22 Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 1:487.

23 Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 1:487.

on *Einbahnstrasse*, 1923, is often considered to be the turning point of the post-1917 revolutionary wave in Europe, marked by the defeat of the November Revolution in Germany, which broke out with the short-lived Hamburg Uprising on October 23rd.²⁴ Paradoxically, then, the unique quality of Benjamin's anthropological internationalism lies in its persistence. While even some of the hardline internationalist USPD members could be seen to embrace, to an extent, the language of *Volk*,²⁵ Benjamin's 1922-23 "Outline" distinctly ascribes this form of collectivity to the solitary, substance-like aspect of human bodily existence (*Körper*) – one which exists outside of history.²⁶ Furthermore, against the backdrop of the first institutions of the new international world order – the League of Nations (1920), and shortly after the Permanent Court of International Justice (1922) – Benjamin's turn-of-the-1920s ruminations on the figure of the extending body of humankind take us back to thinking internationalism outside of the lens of institutions altogether. Holding open the tension between internationalism's grounding in workers' struggle and its claim to world revolution, they remind us to tell apart history made in the name of humankind and its *Leib* from that made in the name of a *Volk's Körper*. The unifying field, in which humankind's *Leib* is forged together out of all that "serves humanity's happiness", including nature, is not international politics, or institutions, but technology: "Technology", Benjamin writes in the 1923 "To the Planetarium", "is the mastery of not nature but of the relation between nature and man" (Benjamin 2004, 487). In it, "a *physis* is being organised through which mankind's contact with the cosmos takes a new and different form from that which it had in nations and families" (*Ibidem*). It is in that sense, that "Men as a species completed their development thousands of years ago; but mankind as a species is just beginning his" (*Ibidem*).

Now to a semi-conclusion. Two aspects of Benjamin's post-1918 internationalism seem particularly painfully nearsighted. For one, Benjamin's lens seems blind to the struggle for a national right to self-determination:

24 Pierre Broué, *The German Revolution, 1917–1923*, ed. Ian Birchall and Brian Pearce, trans. John Archer (Brill, 2005); Eric D. Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton University Press, 2007).

25 Jean-Numa Ducange, *Quand la Gauche pensait la Nation* (Fayard, 2021), 246–49.

26 Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften: Fragmente, autobiographische Schriften*, VI, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Suhrkamp, 1991), 80.

in the planetary perspective on humankind's body, the question of annexationism seemingly disappears into the thin, cosmic air. Perhaps most surprisingly from today's perspective is that the somewhat blind Eurocentrism of his internationalism (to, for instance, the scale of WWI's extent and impact, which stretched from the siege of the German concession in China (Tsingtao), through British attempts to take over German colonies in Africa, to the intense anti-German propaganda in Latin America)²⁷ was closely linked to Benjamin's ambiguous relationship to Zionism.²⁸ Despite his own lifelong considerations and the numerous attempts made by Scholem to convince him to emigrate to Palestine, Benjamin never went to Palestine. Similarly to Ernst Bloch, who treated the German Jewish discourse on assimilation and Zionist projects of state formation in Palestine as two sides of the same bad coin, Benjamin increasingly saw in territorial Zionism a form of *völkisch* nationalism he could not identify with.²⁹ It is in tension with his Jewish identity, that he constructed an idea of Europe as based on the freedom of movement. But Benjamin's Europe is always the Europe of an emigrée – displaced, never an imperial project. In a short sketch from 1923, Benjamin mocks the idea of a German *Mitteleuropa*. A neo-imperial notion, *Mitteleuropa* was popularised by Friedrich Neumann in 1915 to argue that because Austria-Hungary and Germany were too small by themselves to establish an empire after the war could be won, Germany should strive for hegemony over an economic union and for creating a strong, self-sufficient bloc from the Baltic to the Black Sea, encompassing territories like Poland, Ukraine, and the Balkans, often through puppet states. In contrast, in Benjamin's 1923 piece, *Mitteleuropa* stands as a synonym for Germany itself, rather than for the expanded territory under German control. The colonial language of underdevelopment is applied to the reality of economic crisis in Germany, the very centre of the imperial project of

27 Jonathan Krause, ed., *The Greater War. Other Combatant and Other Fronts, 1914–1918* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Ana Paula Pires et al., eds, *The Global First World War: African, East Asian, Latin American and Iberian Mediators* (Routledge, 2021); Jonathan Wrytzen, *Worldmaking in the Long Great War: How Local and Colonial Struggles Shaped the Modern Middle East* (Columbia University Press, 2022).

28 Vivian Liska, "‘A Marvellous Leeway’: Walter Benjamin's Idea of Europe", in *The Idea of Europe: The Clash of Projections* (Brill, 2021).

29 Anson Rabinbach, *In the Shadow of Catastrophe: German Intellectuals Between Apocalypse and Enlightenment* (University of California Press, 1997), 41.

Central Europe in Naumann's optic. If Benjamin's Europe offers a blueprint for a planetary collective identity, it is one based on mobility and the possibility of hesitation that keeps him from emigrating until it's too late, not of a unified federation of states.

The second problem is more ambiguous – and has to do with Benjamin's approach to war. Contrary to what established readings informed by the 1940 "Theses on History"'s stress on the history of the oppressed might lead us to assume, Benjamin's internationalist perspective on war fails to register the suffering of those marked by its atrocities: the displaced, the dispossessed, the disabled. Yet while Benjamin's post-World War I imagery focuses on countering the ecstasy of warmongering with that of a cosmic wholeness, rather than with the perspective of its victims, the framework may yet provide a language for a distinct kind of internationalist solidarity. With Benjamin's figure of the body of humankind, and its thoroughly collective, historical constitution, we can go beyond the idea of solidarity built on mourning and the fragility of individual bodies.³⁰ A life of the collective body, Benjamin's lens reminds us, only includes in its parts – its limbs – whatever serves "humanity's happiness". Its inclusion of technology as a mediating force, in which the "unity" of humankind's body is formed, combined with Benjamin's conscious anti-war construction of the internationalist horizon of his thought open up the vantage point for this other kind of solidarity, based on anthropological, planetary collectivity. If wars belong to it at all – we might add – they do so only insofar as they remind us how interconnected we are, by bringing into view the existing chains of production, key transport choke points, as well as the interconnectedness of the global production of technologies of oppression.³¹ The seizures of the body of humankind that draw our attention to its shape and health should be heard as a call to struggle for its "convalescence".

30 Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (Verso, 2006); Martin Jay, *Immanent Critiques: The Frankfurt School Under Pressure* (Verso, 2023).

31 Antony Loewenstein, *The Palestine Laboratory: How Israel Exports the Technology of Occupation Around the World* (Verso, 2023).

The Politics of Multitude

Between 1994¹ and 2017², two theorists—Italian philosopher Antonio Negri and American political theorist Michael Hardt—developed one of the most ambitious projects in contemporary political philosophy. Their work sought both to diagnose the historical conjuncture in which it emerged and to provide an intellectual and political response to its times. The central aim was to grasp the internal contradictions of late capitalism in its financialized, cognitive, and extractivist forms, while outlining the conditions of possibility for the institutionalization of counter-power in a context of dispersed social conflicts mediated by new communication technologies.

The political philosophy of the multitude they elaborated was thus an attempt to conceptualize a global subject of emancipatory politics in a world unified by flows of people, capital, and commodities. Today, however, this project appears to have come to an end—not only with the death of one of its authors, but also with the transformation of the world it sought to describe. Following the global pandemic, capitalist globalization could no longer evade its long-developing structural crisis. Old forms of nationalist politics returned with renewed force, imperial powers entered into open and violent conflicts, and communication networks were increasingly appropriated by large corporations and state apparatuses of surveillance and propaganda. The global “Empire” and the cycle of alter-globalist struggles have thus reached their limits, while the world has begun to slide toward new forms of fascism aimed at preserving capitalist power under conditions of profound crisis of capital accumulation³.

From such a perspective, one might be tempted to interpret the Hardt–Negri project as a failure. The thesis of a unified global Empire appears outdated in light of renewed inter-imperial rivalries, while hopes

1 Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, *Labor of Dionysus: A Critique of the State-Form*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1994.

2 Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, *Assembly*, Oxford University Press, New York 2017.

3 Alberto Toscano, *New Fascisms and the Crises of Empire: Lessons from the Americas*, “South Atlantic Quarterly” (2024) 123(2): 255–272.

invested in a global, horizontal subject of anti-capitalist politics have not materialized, at least in the short term. Yet the philosophy of the multitude cannot be reduced to the specific diagnoses or political proposals formulated by its authors. Its ambition was broader: to identify the historical and material conditions shaping class struggle, particularly the transformation of labor's technological and organizational forms and the corresponding transformation of mechanisms of value capture⁴.

Any political philosophy grounded in such an analysis faces a fundamental theoretical limitation. Between the diagnosis of conditions and the formulation of political strategy lies a gap that theory alone cannot overcome. As Antonio Gramsci suggested in his notion of the "time of monsters," such thought operates in a transitional space: it describes what has already died while attempting to guide what is yet to emerge. To maintain its critical force, it must move against dominant tendencies both in diagnosis and in prescription. This dialectical position characterizes the Hardt–Negri project⁵, even if their assessments of the possibilities of revolutionary politics were at times overly optimistic. Despite the fact that they ultimately failed to formulate a fully adequate vision of internationalist politics for the present crisis—what might be called an "end-times crisis"⁶—their analyses of its historical and material dynamics remain indispensable.

Their concept of Empire, introduced in their 2000 book⁷, described a global network linking production sectors, logistical infrastructures, military power, and governance mechanisms, coordinated by international financial institutions that regulate the circulation of capital. This was a Marxist attempt to analyze a new phase of capitalist globalization following the collapse of the Soviet bloc. At the same time, it was a theoretical

4 Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, *Empire, Twenty Years On*, "New Left Review" (November–December 2019) 120, <https://newleftreview.org/issues/i120/articles/empire-twenty-years-on>

5 John Grant, *Marcuse Remade? Theory and Explanation in Hardt and Negri*, "Science & Society: A Journal of Marxist Thought and Analysis" (2010) 74(1): 37–62; Mikołaj Ratajczak, *Forma życia i dobro wspólne. Genealogia i aktualność współczesnej włoskiej filozofii politycznej*, Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, Warszawa 2020: 199–257.

6 Astra Taylor, Naomi Klein, *The rise of end times fascism*, "Guardian" (2025) 13 April, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2025/apr/13/end-times-fascism-far-right-trump-musk> (see also their announced book *End Times Fascism: And The Fight for the Living World*).

7 Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 2000.

intervention against dominant accounts of globalization, which framed contemporary transformations as the natural outcome of technological progress, expansion of education, the disappearance of class conflicts typical for industrialization or cultural shifts toward individualism. Such accounts can be understood as ideological formations that obscure capitalism's internal contradictions. Subsequent crises—the dot-com crash, the 2008 financial crisis, the conflicts of the 2010s, and the post-pandemic recession—exposed the limits of these narratives. Theories of postmodernity proved blind to the economic and political logic of late capitalism.

The social ideology of this period was the notion of the “network society,” especially in its optimistic variants, which portrayed digital communication networks as a new, inherently emancipatory *wealth of networks*, which will necessarily expand civil society, democratize access to knowledge, and enhance creativity⁸. Economically, this optimism was linked to the ideology of the “New Economy,” which combined technological determinism with neoliberal financial theory, claiming that the fusion of internet freedom and financial deregulation would eliminate capitalist crises. Politically, these ideas were reinforced by the TINA doctrine (“There Is No Alternative”), culminating in the widely debated thesis of the “end of history.” In post-socialist countries, these ideological formations were closely tied to the discourse of civil society, whose supposed absence served as a convenient explanation for why so many social groups resisted the neoliberal transformation.

Against this background of neoliberal hegemony, Hardt and Negri sought to construct a theoretical and political perspective grounded in the analysis of dispersed but pervasive class struggles—across labor, feminist, queer, racialized, and indigenous movements. Their collaboration emerged from debates among Italian autonomist thinkers of the 1970s, who interpreted neoliberalism as a *counterrevolution*⁹. Central to this perspective was the Operaist principle that social struggles are primary, while the capital-

8 This ideological current found its most intelligent and progressive expression in Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*, Yale University Press, New Haven–London 2006.

9 Paolo Virno, *Do You Remember Counterrevolution?*, trans. Michael Hardt, in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, eds. Michael Hardt, Paolo Virno, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1996, p. 240–259.

ist subsumption is a response to those struggles—a reversal famously described by Mario Tronti as the “Copernican revolution in Marxism”¹⁰.

Within this framework, transformations associated with digital technologies and financialization were interpreted as responses to increasing worker autonomy rather than as autonomous developments. The neoliberal transformation of the 1990s and early twenty-first century was thus understood as a deepening of processes already underway since the 1970s: the capture and commodification of desires for autonomy, creativity, communication, and self-realization¹¹.

Central to these debates was the question of labor and value. Discussions around Marx’s concept of the “general intellect”¹², the crisis of the labor theory of value¹³, the return of rent, and transformations in the subsumption of work under capital¹⁴—including reproductive work¹⁵—produced new conceptual tools for analyzing contemporary capitalism. Rather than proclaiming the end of work, these theorists emphasized the emergence of new forms of labor and exploitation in the context of digitalization and financialization¹⁶.

Neoliberalism, from this perspective, appears as a parasitic appropriation of the aspirations of social movements. It captures and commodifies desires for autonomy and transforms them into mechanisms of control and exploitation. As Paolo Virno argues, post-Fordist capitalism is characterized by a paradox: general intelligence and knowledge become the central productive force, bringing the criteria of valorization prevalent in

10 Mario Tronti, *Operai e capitale*, DeriveApprodi, Roma 2013.

11 Franco Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody. Semio-capitalism and the Pathologies of the Post-Alpha Generation*, Autonomedia, London 2009.

12 Paolo Virno, *General Intellect*, trans. Arianna Bové, „Historical Materialism” 2007, vol. 15, p. 3–8.

13 Antonio Negri, *Valeur-travail: crise et problèmes de reconstruction dans le post-moderne*, “Futur Antérieur” 1992, 2(10), p. 30–36.

14 Carlo Vercellone, *From Formal Subsumption to General Intellect: Elements for a Marxist Reading of the Thesis of Cognitive Capitalism*, „Historical Materialism” 2007, 15(1), p. 13–36.

15 Silvia Federici, *Il punto zero della rivoluzione. Lavoro domestico, riproduzione e lotta femminista*, Feltrinelli, Milan 2014.

16 Christian Marazzi, *Capital and Language: From the New Economy to the War Economy*, trans. Gregory Conti, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles 2008.

industrial capitalism into profound crisis, yet capitalism persists without overcoming itself¹⁷.

The theory of multitude as the subject of class struggles in late, cognitive capitalism stems from a theoretical perspective that views the neoliberal transformation not only as a reaction to the crisis of industrial capitalism, but also to the growing strength of workers and social movements, which were gaining increasing autonomy in the political sphere, in cultural creativity, and in the production process (similar tendencies, incidentally, could be observed in the countries of real socialism during the same period, with the most important example being Poland's Solidarity—also included by Hardt and Negri among historical examples of the politics of multitude¹⁸). Unlike many popular sociological theories analyzing the same process of counterrevolution, which distinguish the aspirations of the artistic avant-garde from workers' movements¹⁹, from the perspective of the political philosophy of multitude, the crisis of the Fordist model of production and accumulation in developed countries was driven by a widespread struggle for autonomy, even if different classes and social groups articulated this need in different ways. And the neoliberal reaction consisted in seizing these hard-won areas of autonomy and subsuming them once again under the principle of capital accumulation (and, in the case of post-socialist countries, also in incorporating them into the process of ideological legitimization of new primitive accumulation of the wealth of societies subjected to shock therapy).

The concept of the multitude emerges from this theoretical context as a subject of new forms of labor—often described as "immaterial"²⁰ or "biopolitical"²¹. These concepts do not merely describe types of activity but rather new modes of value extraction. The aim was not merely to find a suf-

17 Virno, *General Intellect*, s. 4–5.

18 Hardt, Negri, *Assembly*, s. 248.

19 Luc Boltanski, Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliott, Verso, London–New York 2005.

20 Maurizio Lazzarato, *Immaterial labor*, in Paolo Virno, Michael Hardt (eds.). *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, pp. 142–157.

21 Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 2009, p. 139.

ficiently handy and general term for analyzing the composition of the new workforce. It was also to describe the profound social, technological, and economic transformation not from the perspective of changes in communication, logistics, new technologies, or mass culture, but specifically from the perspective of labor. For immaterial or biopolitical labor was not merely a description of new types of activity, a different nature of the tasks performed, different tools, objects, or the results of the production process (its mediation through new technologies); these were concepts referring primarily to new ways of appropriating the surplus value produced in society. The aim, therefore, was to diagnose how the “network society” transforms relations of exploitation and, thereby, transforms the dominant regime of accumulation. It is no coincidence that the theory of cognitive capitalism emerged from discussions surrounding the concepts of immaterial labor and “general intellect”—one of the first comprehensive analyses of the internet as a dispositif for appropriating the free labor of the multitude within communication networks²²—an approach that, two decades later, would be taken for granted in the debates on surveillance capitalism.

Multitude is thus, first and foremost, the subject of immaterial or biopolitical labor—or, to be precise, the subject of new forms of exploitation in a society where surplus value is generated in both the process of production and reproduction. Nevertheless, these new forms of labor give rise to new forms of subjectivity. The traditional distinctions between labor, practice, and intellectual activity are blurring; multitude has become a term for the collective subject that works and produces value, engaging its entire subjectivity and entire life, including dispositions typically employed in the spheres of ethical or political activity²³. Theses that at the turn of the century might still have sounded like anthropological speculation detached from concrete sociological or economic analyses have since been confirmed by the technological transformation of the work and production process—the development of AI has unequivocally shown that the division between

22 Carlo Vercellone (ed.), *Sommes—nous sortis du capitalisme industriel?*, La Dispute, Paris 2003; Carlo Vercellone, *The Hypothesis of Cognitive Capitalism*, 2005, https://hal-paris1.archives-ouvertes.fr/file/index/docid/273641/filename/The_hypothesis_of_Cognitive_Capitalismhall.pdf.

23 Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, trans. Isabella Bertolotti, James Cascaito, Andrea Casson, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles 2004.

intellectual and manual labor has always been an artificial one, and that the labor of a car driver requires at least as many knowledge and information processing steps as the work of a lawyer or translator.²⁴

Multitude is thus both a (new) subject of labor, exploitation, and class struggle, and a term denoting a far more basic, one might say even “ontological”, plane of life and practices— or rather the formation of collective forms of life. This tension between the historical and ontological levels lies at the very heart of the political philosophy of multitude²⁵. Multitude is both the subject that creates social order as such—the source of all wealth and the rules for producing that wealth, i.e. the *constituent power*²⁶—and the concrete historical subject of labor, politics, and exploitation. What characterizes its historical form in the era of late-capitalist crisis, however, is the fact that the concrete historical forms of its practice are increasingly converging with the ontological level: labor becomes praxis and thinking, production begins to merge into a single process with communication and reproduction, and relations of exploitation and domination have already encompassed all forms of social activity. In this realized dystopia of capitalism, in which there is no longer any exterior, crisis becomes the norm, and the constant reaction to ceaseless changes in living and working conditions becomes indistinguishable from new forms of class struggle.

This is precisely the arena where two tendencies clash today: the revolutionary tendency of the multitude to shape the world through the use of the technologies, knowledge, and information available to it—driven by the desire to access these resources and use them autonomously—and the counterrevolutionary tendency to subjugate this autonomous use, its products, and the desire for autonomy to the value form and the production of surplus value. The former tendency aims to abolish traditional class, gender, or national divisions: universal access to information and the tools for processing it undermines identities based on education; data processing

24 See Matteo Pasquinelli, *The Eye of the Master: A Social History of Artificial Intelligence*, Verso, London–New York 2023.

25 Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, The Penguin Press, New York 2004, p. 218.

26 Antonio Negri, *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State*, trans. Maurizio Boscagli, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis–London 1999.

technologies facilitate horizontal communication between social groups, across cultures and languages; and communication networks connecting the multitude increase the autonomy to shape forms of life. The second trend, however, embeds these processes within new, globalized divisions of power and exploitation, creating class divisions whose nature and scale far exceed those characteristic of industrial capitalism, in which the blurring of identities based on education all too easily gives way to new forms of deskilling. The clash of these tendencies means that, although capital accumulation is increasingly concentrated among a small group of owners of global dispositives for capturing and processing information, social struggles center mainly on issues of access to digital resources and the ability to shape one's individual identity. The multitude, as the subject of new class struggles, is unable to understand itself as a subject of exploitation and class conflict; instead, it operates in the language of ethics, freedom, identity, or the fight against corruption, because it does not recognize the autonomy it desires as the stake of contemporary *class* struggles.

The revolution that swept through developed economies during the crisis of Fordist capitalism—from the 1960s to the 1980s, in both capitalist and socialist countries—concerned precisely the issue of autonomy affecting the entire social sphere, including production and labor (let us recall the demands for workers' self-management, which were formulated during the 1968 revolutions in France and Italy, as well as in Yugoslavia, or during the Prague Spring, and later also by Solidarity). The neoliberal counterrevolution hijacked these desires and, after suppressing autonomous social and workers' movements—having recognized the real revolutionary process—exploited their forces to subjugate social desires to the program of building a new hegemony of capital. As a result, we find ourselves in a situation in which multitude as a living subject capable of transforming itself and the world converges asymptotically with multitude as a subject of labor and production, but on the level of political articulation, the autonomy toward which multitude always strives focuses on a fetishized level of "life" (social life, individual life) detached from a life subordinated to the demands of labor, production and generating value for capital.

What remains most relevant in the Hardt–Negri project is their recognition of the deep ambivalence of these conditions and their attempts to formulate a conceptual language and political program to posit the mul-

titude as constituent power, the multitude as labor and producer of value and the multitude as desiring autonomy as one revolutionary subject of class politics. Their specific political proposals—such as abandoning traditional forms of organization like parties and trade unions in favor of horizontal networks²⁷—may now appear misguided, particularly in the context of rising authoritarianisms, which clearly point to traditional forms of organization as surely not sole, but invariably necessary tools for political struggle and resistance. Nevertheless, the transformation of the subject of class struggle cannot be ignored. It is now a subject that simultaneously works and lives, continuously adapting, processing information, and creatively applying its capacities. It does not easily conform to traditional political hierarchies or models of authority.

The resurgence of authoritarian fantasies may be understood as a reaction to this expanded autonomy. The multitude is neither inherently good nor inherently evil—it is fundamentally unpredictable and, therefore, dangerous²⁸. Its defining experience is the capacity for continuous transformation of both self and world, which implies a condition of permanent crisis. In this sense, the politics of the multitude can be understood as a politics of the “end-times crisis.” Rather than striving to restore a stable normality, it seeks to create new forms of life within conditions of irreversible instability. The central challenge for contemporary class struggle is therefore to direct the desires of the multitude toward new forms of internationalist solidarity—grounded in communication technologies, the reconfiguration of divisions between intellectual and manual labor, production and reproduction, and the destabilization of fixed social identities.

27 Hardt, Negri, *Assembly*, p. 193.

28 Paolo Virno, *Multitude Between Innovation and Negation*, trans. Isabella Bertolotti, James Cascaito, Andrea Casson, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles 2008, p. 56–65.

Aleksandra Hołubowicz

Interstitial Pedagogies in (the Absence of) Teacher(–Student) Activism in Poland and the Czech Republic

This intervention concerns the absence of robust teacher activism in Poland and the Czech Republic. The idea stems from my research on the formation of political consciousness at schools in Poland, the Czech Republic and Norway – which does not center subject matter, i.e. content of Civics, but how students acquire democracy “by the way” – mostly in the course of literature classes and foreign language classes, but also how democratic values declared as fundamental, manifest themselves in the schoolscape. Chandler Miranda defines the latter term as “much more than a backdrop for education; it is a landscape rich with potential and shared experiences” as well as “the interplay between the physical and social environment for teaching and learning” (Miranda, 2026, p. 64). Hence, it encompasses relations between the leadership and other employees, between staff members, teacher-student rapport, the atmosphere at school, along space organization – type of rooms, interior design, decorations etc.

Relying on Freire’s assumption that one cannot learn democracy in an authoritarian manner (Freire, 2005) I embarked on my project to explore ideas in the field of philosophy (of education) and education studies, in addition to conducting a (post)qualitative research in selected schools in the Czech Republic, Poland and Norway to gather inspirations anchored in practice. From the empirical and theoretical data emerges a concept of “interstitial pedagogies”, directly catalyzed by my reading of Stanislav Biler’s dystopic novel *Destrukce* (Biler, 2021), energized by theoretical texts.

Biler’s book features a story of a man who, in an attempt to escape the humdrum existence in a concrete-covered city, moves to the countryside, where he takes up a teaching position. The romanticized rural idyl turns out to be as concrete-conquered as in the urban areas with the ongoing environmental degradation and the inhabitants equally individualistic and atomized. The local factory, advertised by the village establishment as fostering economic life, sucks up all the water, which causes droughts and emergence of cracks in the walls of all buildings. The story culminates with

a spectacular collapse of most buildings – but the catastrophe lends itself to an opportunity of starting anew.

The tale is an obvious metaphor for the unsustainability of living under extractive capitalism with mandatory education as its propagandist tool. It is not a mere metaphor, though, as there is ample research pointing to schooling as reinforcing social inequalities, despite the proclaimed objectives that aim at providing equal opportunities and upward mobility e.g. (Mikiewicz, 2016), (Prokop, 2023). Whereas a substantial transformation of the schooling system would benefit all involved, it is unlikely that it will occur as a top-down solution. Therefore, I see “interstitial pedagogies” as daily interventions that could be deployed ad hoc, immediately without waiting for any government-led reform. I use Biler’s novel as a springboard for my ruminations: the story can be treated as a special case of interstitial pedagogies that are applied by the teacher-in-community. My emphasis is on collective and collaborative action of learning in a community, with the teacher in a role of a facilitator of encounter (Inayatullah, 2022), construction (Coto & Dirckinck-Holmfeld, 2008) and cultivation of knowledge (Coles, 2022).

Theoretical framework

The framework for my work in the field of philosophy of education has been defined by critical pedagogy as proposed by Paulo Freire and later developed by scholars who conjugated theory and teaching practice including bell hooks, Naeem Inayatullah’s pedagogy of encounter (Inayatullah, 2022), Eli Meyerhoff’s alternative to education-based modes of study (Meyerhoff, 2019), and various scholars who contributed to the book *Subversive Pedagogies* (Schick & Timperley, 2021). I also draw on philosophy to apply a lens of rhizomatic thinking (Deleuze & Guattari), along its special emphasis on education (Mayes, 2023), Latour’s Actant-Network Theory (Latour, 2005) and border thinking (Mignolo, 2000) as derived from Gloria Anzaldúa’s *nepantlerismo* (Anzaldúa, 1987) with in-betweenness in education thinking (Mulcahy, 2011).

I draw on the term “acquisition” derived from language acquisition theory, as contrasted with “learning” – the former implies internalization of the language and the ability to use it fluently as distinct from the latter stressing a conscious and systematic study of grammar structures and

vocabulary, which might remain formal. Acquisition has traditionally been used as a subconscious (Krashen, 2002) process that enables development of the skill to use the language rather than a mere recognition of structures or knowledge "about" them. Applied to democracy, this would denote the practice of democracy in everyday life, thus going beyond the memorization of how a democratic system is formally organized, as usually expounded in textbooks for Civics.

(The absence of) Teacher grassroots activism

This paper directs attention to the ways in which teachers in the Czech Republic and Poland engage in grassroots activism related to becoming an important force that can influence their own workplaces and the education system. My interest also lies in how interstitial pedagogies can be applied in teachers' organizing. Since teachers are to be the agents of change and those responsible for instilling democratic values in students, it is interesting to scrutinize how they themselves have "acquired" democracy and how they deploy democratic strategies in everyday life. It would mean exploring to what extent they endeavor to influence the way in which schools function. So far I haven't managed to find ample sources on the issue. I also draw on autoethnography reflecting on my experience of working in three schools in Poland in the years 2001-2016 and in two schools in the Czech Republic from 2025 till now. In my current teaching position I have been keeping a journal, as recommended by an established pedagogy and social movements scholar, Piotr Kowzan, an established scholar in the field of pedagogy and social movements, which can offer insight into the daily challenges and struggles.

Even though "teachers are one of the most organized professional groups in Poland in terms of union density, number, and scale of strikes" (Rakowska, 2025) their mobilization seems to be principally reactive: to resist certain governmental reforms. However, the issue that remains central to most organizing is inadequate salaries. In the 2019 strike dubbed "the largest teachers' strike in Poland's history" (Kowzan, 2023, p. 125) (Rakowska, 2025) the two goals were combined – demands for a substantial raise in salaries were accompanied by opposition to the inadequately prepared and prompt reforms that presupposed a thorough and instantaneous transformation of the school system. These were immediately implemented when

the new PiS-led government took power without consultations with teachers or scholars in the field of education. The strike did not achieve its goals and was suspended after an approximate 3 weeks.

It does not mean that teachers do not take any initiative; on the contrary, there can be enumerated a plethora of individual and collaborative projects, associations, NGOs, workshops and summer schools founded, co-created and attended by teachers, but they aim at providing a "higher quality" of education or instances to enhance professional development. There doesn't appear to be, however, much research on teachers' grassroots organizing with the objective of radical democratization of their workplaces, which suggests that it mirrors the actual state. Neither does there seem to exist significant teachers-students' collaboration in this respect.

In the Czech Republic the situation seems to be similar. I have accessed limited sources on teacher activism – it is subsumed under trade unionism in general as outlined in the work on history of the association of trade unions ČMKOS, prepared by an academic team employed by the association (Pokorný, 2020). Teachers' resistance to reforms is sometimes interpreted as reluctance to adopt new didactic methods and approaches and blamed on the pedagogic conservatism and rigidity of older teachers who, driven by the force of their habits, refuse to introduce innovations in their practice (Zormanová, 2020). In the same article Zormanová identifies teachers' attitudes to reforms as "a little studied phenomenon" (Zormanová, 2020, p. 89).

In both countries if there are efforts to build a more democratic school, these tend to remain individual initiatives that denote moving outside the public system and finding a niche that is usually only accessible to students from privileged backgrounds.

"Seizing the means of (knowledge) production" or influencing them has never been articulated in the schools I have worked in, in informal conversations with colleagues or by my respondents in the study conducted as part of my postdoctoral project. To be fair it is not a question I asked, but my semi-structured interviews have never steered toward the issue, even though quite a few of my interviewees identified as leftists or left-wing.

I treat this draft as an interlude to a new research project which would examine the reasons for the little or no influence of teachers on their

workplaces, school policies and the education system. I hypothesize that among the reasons for the absence of robust teacher activism in Poland and the Czech Republic “the union legitimacy crisis” (Rakowska, 2025, p. 260) is an important factor. Whereas she talks about a specific union – ZNP, this can be seen in a wider perspective: distrust of unions, especially those considered post-communist to many echoes the former regime, but also negative first-hand experience of many instill skepticism even if anti-communist sentiment does not play a role (e.g. conflict of interest, when the school leadership overlaps with a union leadership in a given institution). Other reasons for marginal organizing embrace:

- Teaching as a highly feminized profession
- Implied care work: a sense of responsibility for the future of the students and relationships cause many to refrain from radical action so as not to affect their students negatively
- Unrecognized emotional work: pedagogy operates in the field of mundane temporality (Bródy, Pixová, & Korolczuk, 2026)- emotional work happens on a daily basis, but it is not recognized as work, as the main part of pedagogy is to be didactics of a given subject and preparation of students for standardized tests, certification
- “Unideological” education post 1989 as the goal - teachers are afraid of seeming political?
- Little access to free meeting spaces or funding (Majewska, 2018)

The main objective would be to conceptualize the ways to employ interstitial pedagogies not only as confined to teaching students/boosting students learning, but as a tool in teacher activism to strive for change. These can be perceived as part of interstitial strategies for transformation, as theorized by Erik Olin Wright:

There are two principal ways that interstitial strategies within capitalism potentially point the way beyond capitalism: first, by altering the conditions for eventual rupture, and second, by gradually expanding the effective scope and depth of their operations so that capitalist constraints cease to impose binding limits (Wright, 2010, p. 328).

In search of sustainable scenarios for teacher activism, I would like to draw on the already existent inspiring practices incl. Keith Catone's *Pedagogy of Teacher Activism* (Catone, 2017), derive from the scholarship on hope and engage in imagining collectively the ways to induce rupture in the system (Wright, 2010) or a grand collapse, as in Biler's novel. The latter would lend an opportunity to forge innovative practices. These would entail Deleuzian-Guattarian-like flexibility, resourcefulness, the ability to respond to volatility, and embracing changeability rather than developing a new, solid structure.

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Michaela Pixová

Care as an Interstitial Political Grammar: Reintroducing Collectivism and Welfare Imaginaries in Post-Socialist Czechia

Introduction

In Czechia, like in many other post-socialist countries, the language of collectivism, class, and welfare has long been politically delegitimized by dominant narratives equating them with authoritarian state socialism and/or totalitarian communism (see e.g. Chelcea and Druță 2016; Pixová and Kolářová 2026; Pixová 2018). Since the 1990s, citizens have been consistently indoctrinated by perspectives which present neoliberal restructuring as the only alternative to the previous system, and as an inevitable and morally desirable condition of a functioning democracy and free society. With neoliberal governments orchestrating the dismantling of the state built under communism under the promise of prosperity and catching up with Western living standards, people in Czechia have internalized perspectives which frame markets as neutral, efficient, and emancipatory, and cast collective infrastructures as relics of an oppressive past (e.g. Bohle and Greskovits 2012; Gagyi 2015). This mentality, often accompanied by moralizing discourses of individual responsibility and self-reliance, gave green light to the gradual dismantling of welfare institutions, public housing, and labour protections.

36 years after the regime change, post-socialist neoliberal hegemony has been consolidated by Czech civil society largely internalizing a depoliticized, technocratic mode of governance, which treats capitalism and liberal democracy as a non-ideological and uncontested package. The general belief in the capitalismcumdemocracy package has been recently shaken by the attempts of the incumbent government, elected in October 2025, to hollow out democracy from within. The government is doing this by stigmatizing and restricting civil society and through illiberal attacks on public institutions' independence and their instrumentalization for executive control and capture for oligarchic interests. Mass mobilizations against the governments' illiberal steps, such as those organised by the *Milion chvilek pro demokracii* movement, which operated especially under the first gov-

ernment of Andrej Babiš between 2019 and 2021 (Vachudová et al. 2024), have reactivated participation in the name of defending democratic norms with the second rule of Babiš since 2025. The movement's critique of the current politics nonetheless continues to be framed in moral, legalistic, or managerial terms, largely avoiding structural critique and explicit antagonism over socio-economic alternatives. Political conflict is thus displaced and injustice continues to be seen as a matter of policy failure or ethical lapse rather than as an outcome of systemic power relations. This configuration reproduces what Mouffe (2011) calls the post-political consensus, in which civil society on one hand defends democratic norms against authoritarian threats while it simultaneously, often unintendedly, helps to stabilize a technocratic neoliberal order by its refusal or hesitation to challenge socio-economic inequalities. There is only marginal and slowly emerging awareness among the mainstream society that these inequalities in fact underpin the very support for illiberal politics that pro-democratic mobilisations seek to combat.

In this context, conservative, reactionary and illiberal actors tend to portray civil society organisations and pro-democratic actors as "Western imports" disconnected from local realities. This label often applies to both NGOs embedded in the neoliberal order, but also to the actors which operate in more ambiguous, interstitial positions on the edge of the current system, where they contest capitalist logics of privatization, commodification and accumulation. This second group of actors and organisations is characterised by fostering structural critique which challenges inequalities and injustices within the neoliberal hegemony. In various ways, these actors engage in collective organising aimed at defending and rebuilding the ruins of post-socialist collectivity. Groups such as Re-set, grassroots climate collectives, Sdružení, the Tenants' Initiative, spatially dispersed housing collectives, emerging unions like Alice and many others, engage with state institutions and public infrastructures in emancipatory ways which could provide the grounds for rebuilding trust in collectivism and welfare system in the mainstream society. Yet at the same time, these actors and collectives often face stigmatizing attacks not only by reactionary forces, but often also by mainstream citizens who sometimes portray left-ist projects as a form of left-wing extremism (Charvát 2024; Slačálek 2021; Gagyí and Slačálek 2021). Moreover, some public institutions such as the Czech Ministry of the Interior, contribute to this framing by officially cate-

gorizing large portions of leftwing activity under security and extremism discourses, reinforcing mainstream perceptions (see MoI CR 2025).

This draft paper is a preliminary attempt to explore how collectives mobilize care as an interstitial political grammar through which collectivism and welfare-oriented politics are reintroduced without explicitly invoking class-based or socialist rhetoric. The draft builds on the most recent paper "Mobilising care in the polycrisis: Framing eco-social activism in Hungary, Czechia, and Poland" (Bródy, Pixová and Korolczuk in print) where my colleagues and I introduce our research on eco-social activism in post-socialist contexts through the prism of feminist ethics of care. The paper analyses care in ecoleft movements in Hungary, Poland and Czechia across three interconnected dimensions. The first dimension is affective care, which mobilizes emotions such as empathy, concern, and anger to frame ecological and social crises as matters of shared vulnerability and moral responsibility. The second is relational care, which builds collective responsibility and crossmovement solidarity by foregrounding interdependence rather than fixed identities. The third dimension is reproductive care, pointing to practices which help activist communities in preventing burnout and enable their longterm engagement. Together, these dimensions show how care operates simultaneously as an emotional resource, a relational organizing principle, and a material condition for sustaining collective action (ibid.).

This draft paper thus argues that care can also function as an interstitial political grammar enabling reintroduction of collectivism and welfare imaginaries into post-socialist settings. This reintroduction via care takes shape through explicit articulation of care, or by care being practising and enacted as modes of organising. Following Butler (2015) and Hemmings (2011), political grammar is here understood „as the set of cultural and discursive rules that shape what forms of political claims, emotions and responsibilities are considered legitimate in public life" (Bródy, Pixová and Korolczuk in print). This framework allows actors to articulate collective responsibility, mutual dependence, and redistribution in a political environment hostile to overtly left-wing claims.

Post-Socialist Care between Neoliberal Disarticulation and Collective Needs

In Central and Eastern Europe, care and welfare have not been historically experienced as harmful, quite the opposite. However, redistributive politics, collective welfare and public institutions more broadly are still entangled with post-socialist memory politics. Under state socialism, care and welfare were universalized but also bureaucratized and depoliticized, often stripped of their participatory or emancipatory dimensions. After 1989, neoliberal and anti-communist narratives re-signified the legacies of state-provided care and welfare as symbols of inefficiency, dependency, and moral failure, symbolically bound up with the entire discredited socialist project (see e.g. Burawoy and Verdery 1999; Chelcea & Druță 2016).

As a result, explicit calls for solidarity, redistribution, or class struggle often provoke suspicion or backlash. In this discursive context, care provides a promising way to re-politicize collective needs without triggering anti-communist reflexes. This was for example the case during the Covid-19 pandemic, which revealed the indispensable role of care professions for the society, and their worthiness of bigger societal and financial appreciation. This narrative was also reproduced by Czech environmental organisations, which pointed out how care is more essential for social functioning and reproduction than uninterrupted industrial production driven by profit and producing GHG emissions. This care-based discourse managed to avoid evoking a return to "the socialist past," and instead foregrounded everyday caring practices as essential for sustaining life in the present. As shown in our paper on eco-social activism, care has the capacity to sustain life in the form of housing, energy access, food provision, bodily autonomy, mental health, and ecological survival (Bródy, Pixová and Korolczuk in print).

As a result, explicit calls for solidarity, redistribution, or class struggle often provoke suspicion or outright backlash. In this discursive context, care offers a politically productive way to repoliticize collective needs without triggering entrenched anticommunist reflexes. This dynamic became particularly visible during the Covid19 pandemic, which exposed the indispensable role of care provision in sustaining society and strengthened claims for its broader social recognition and material valuation. Similar narratives were subsequently mobilized by Czech environmental organizations, which emphasized that practices of care are more crucial for social

functioning and reproduction than uninterrupted profitdriven industrial production responsible for greenhouse gas emissions. Framed in this way, carebased discourse avoided evoking a return to “the socialist past” and instead foregrounded everyday caring practices as essential to sustaining life in the present. As demonstrated in our analysis of ecosocial activism, care operates as a lifesustaining capacity across multiple domains, including housing, energy access, food provision, bodily autonomy, mental health, and ecological survival (Bródy, Pixová, and Korolczuk, in print).

Crucially, this does not mean that care is apolitical or merely humanitarian. On the contrary, Czech grassroots collectives increasingly articulate and enact care as a public and collective responsibility that requires institutional support, regulation, and redistribution. In doing so, they emphasise relationality, vulnerability, and interdependence, rather than paternalistic provision of classical welfare.

Care Between Resistance and Reproduction

A central tension explored by the panel concerns whether grassroots care-based practices stand in opposition to post-socialist capitalism or risk reproducing it. The mobilization of care in Czech civic collectives exemplifies this ambiguity.

On the one hand, care practices can compensate for the withdrawal of the state, thereby aligning with neoliberal modes of governance by filling gaps left by the dismantling of welfare systems. These gaps emerge at a moment when neoliberal hegemony and profit-driven environmental destruction are placing growing strain on social reproduction and the reproduction of life. Mutual aid, volunteer labour, and emotional support become crucial strategies for coping with this constellation, yet they also risk functioning as substitutes for structural solutions—especially when such practices remain underfunded, feminized, and informal. This dynamic is particularly evident in environmental organisations, where activists confront a highly asymmetrical adversary in the fossil fuel industry and fossil oligarchies. Operating under conditions of chronic scarcity and urgency, activists often work at the edge of burnout, with blurred boundaries between political engagement and personal life (Bródy, Pixová, and Korolczuk, in print; Polanska 2026). In this context, practices of selfcare and care within collectives can inadvertently intensify individualized responsibility

for sustaining both one's own wellbeing and that of others, rather than alleviating the structural conditions that produce exhaustion in the first place.

On the other hand, there are also many collectives which enact care without naming it as such, embedding it instead in everyday practices and organizational routines that address vulnerability while pointing beyond it. Tenant organizing in Sweden illustrates this dynamic particularly well by practising and enacting care through everyday organisational routines, relational work, and spatialtemporal practices (Polanska 2026). Also in the case of the Czech Tenants' Initiative¹, care is not framed discursively as an ethical or political concept but is practiced through legal "first aid" for tenants facing eviction, the production of accessible guides on rental rights, longterm accompaniment of threatened households, and sustained community organizing in precarious localities. These practices respond to immediate needs created by housing insecurity, yet they are consistently linked to broader political demands for rent regulation, the expansion of public housing, and the recognition of housing as a social right. Care thus operates implicitly as a practical mode of sustaining life under conditions of market domination and public infrastructures' dismantlement. It simultaneously serves as a critique of market failure and an argument for rebuilding collective welfare infrastructures, rather than as charity or individualized support.

Similarly, eco-social groups like Re-set: The Platform for Social-Ecological Transformation² and the Degrowth team at NaZemi³ link ecological sustainability to social welfare, emphasizing that climate and environmental policies without social care reproduce inequality and alienation. By centring energy poverty, food insecurity, and access to commons, these actors challenge the dominant neoliberal framing of environmentalism as an individual lifestyle choice or technocratic optimization problem.

In this sense, care operates as interstitial political grammar. It inhabits the gaps between resistance and reproduction, navigating the contradictions of acting within shrinking public infrastructures while insisting

1 <https://iniciativanajemniku.cz/>

2 <https://re-set.cz/>

3 <https://nerust.cz/>

that these post-collective infrastructures must be again collectively reclaimed rather than abandoned.

Care as Pedagogy: Relearning Collectivity After Neoliberalism

Beyond immediate political demands, mobilizing care also has a pedagogical function. Decades of post-socialist neoliberal restructuring have not only dismantled institutions but also reshaped political subjectivities, eroding collective imaginaries and expectations of the state. While solidarity as a concept, practice and idea has been discredited due to being associated with statesocialist discourse, propaganda, and coercive collectivism (Verdery 1996; Burawoy and Verdery 1999), activists and collectives must often learn to practice solidarity anew, this time through developing genuine social bonds and through mobilizing collective claims. An important aspect of these processes is the unlearning of neoliberal moral economy which people internalized through their perception of solidarity as something morally regressive (see Ost 2005).

Workshops, assemblies, community dinners, and affective labour within movements serve as sites of informal political education, where participants practice cooperation, conflict resolution, nonviolent communication and shared responsibility. In an experiential way, these spaces produce alternative knowledges about how society might function otherwise.

This pedagogical aspect is particularly important in a context where discourse associated with state socialism remains stigmatized. Care and solidarity allow activists to speak about exploitation, inequality, and dispossession indirectly, through shared experiences of exhaustion, precarity, and unmet needs. Rather than mobilizing people through collective identities, typical for identity-based mobilisations (e.g. workers, LGBTQ+ movements), care draws people into political engagement by activating existing relations of interdependence, responsibility, and shared vulnerability (Bródy, Pixová and Korolczuk in print; Tronto 2013).

Reactionary Backlash and the NGO Question

Despite care functioning as an interstitial political grammar that enables some ecoleft groups to engage in collective solidarity without relying on a

language delegitimized by neoliberal and anticommunist narratives, care-based organizing is increasingly exposed to pressure from authoritarian and reactionary forces. In Czechia, these forces have gained noticeable strength in recent months. Some care-oriented collectives have already been affected by cuts to public funding and face further threats from planned policy changes targeting so-called “political NGOs,” including proposals to establish a special state register for organizations receiving foreign funding under legislation informally referred to as the “Russian Act.” In this context, organizations primarily financed through membership fees or internal contributions enjoy a relative advantage. However, the expanding illiberal political climate poses risks not only to formally institutionalized NGOs but also to actors operating at the margins of organized activism.

Conservative and reactionary forces increasingly target individuals and institutions that articulate collective rights or engage in civic education challenging hegemonic power relations. Universities have become a particularly visible focus of such attacks, framed as spaces of ideological indoctrination rather than critical inquiry. In one case, *Aliance pro rodinu*—an organization that regularly encounters student-led blockades of its annual March for Life—accused Charles University of indoctrinating students against conservative segments of society, thereby allegedly failing to uphold political neutrality and tolerating extremism within academia.⁴ In another instance, the Czech government publicly criticized Charles University after two students were linked to an arson attack on the LPP Holding company in Pardubice, a firm producing surveillance and drone technologies and accused by the group of complicity in Israeli military operations in Gaza. This intervention triggered scrutiny of teaching practices at the Faculty of Humanities, culminating in the suspension of a doctoral student from teaching due to his syllabus addressing political organizing in response to the climate crisis. Attention was directed at the appearance of the term “sabotage” in the course materials, which became the focal point of political complaint and accusations of extremist indoctrination. The course will allegedly be cancelled in the coming academic year. Subsequently, in response to public criticism accusing the faculty of too easily

4 <https://alipro.cz/otevreny-dopis-vedeni-univerzity-karlovy/>

giving in to the state, the faculty issued a public statement⁵ asserting that the syllabus had already been reviewed and addressed internally prior to the governmental intervention, suggesting that the disciplinary response was implemented as part of standard academic oversight, rather than under external political pressure.

Ironically, the same actors who accuse civic groups of being “Marxist”, “ideological”, “terrorist” or “extremist” often rely on care rhetoric themselves—mobilizing nationalist and familial notions of care to justify exclusionary policies. Also, clear contradictions exist between governmental and conservative accusations of universities for supporting allegedly harmful activities which are in fact care based. Blockades against March for Life stem from feminist values and are driven by caring for women’s rights. Also, teaching about climate crisis and climate activism is a form of knowledge production aimed at creating conditions enabling the reproduction of life on Earth, while a ban on such a course signifies lack of care for the future and humanity’s survival in the name of short-term profit by fossil oligarchs. This underscores the ambivalence of care as a political concept: while it can disrupt neoliberal individualism and exclusionary and profit-driven politics, it can also be co-opted into conservative or authoritarian projects.

Ironically, many of the same actors who accuse civic groups, activists, or academic institutions of being “Marxist,” “ideological,” “terrorist,” or “extremist” frequently rely on carebased rhetoric themselves, mobilizing nationalist and familial notions of care to legitimize exclusionary policies and authoritarian interventions. This produces a series of contradictions. Student blockades of the March for Life, for example, are rooted in feminist ethics and motivated by care for women’s rights and bodily autonomy, yet are reframed by conservative voices as threats to social order. Similarly, teaching about the climate crisis and climate activism constitutes a form of knowledge production oriented toward sustaining the conditions for life on Earth, while the suppression of such teaching signals a denial of care for future generations in the name of shortterm economic interests aligned with fossilfuel industries. These tensions underscore the ambivalence of care as a political concept: while care can disrupt neoliberal individualism

5 <https://fhs.cuni.cz/FHS-1002.html?news=29359&locale=cz>

and profitdriven, exclusionary politics, it can also be selectively appropriated and weaponized within conservative and authoritarian projects.

The collectives discussed here address this challenge by mobilizing care primarily as a practical mode of collective organization rather than as an explicit discursive framework, enacting egalitarian and redistributive relations that implicitly reveal the contradictions of nationalist care discourses which claim to protect “families” while eroding public services.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that care functions as an interstitial political grammar through which grassroots collectives in Czechia reintroduce collectivism and welfare-oriented politics in a post-socialist neoliberal context. Operating in interstitial spaces, which are neither fully oppositional nor fully integrated, these actors mobilize care to articulate collective responsibility, contest privatization, and sustain resistant subjectivities in the absence of robust public infrastructures.

Care does not replace class politics, nor does it guarantee emancipation. It still risks remaining gendered, unevenly distributed, and vulnerable to co-optation. Yet precisely because of its relational, affective, and everyday character, care allows activists to challenge dominant political grammars that equate freedom with markets and responsibility with individualization.

In post-socialist societies where collectivist language has been delegitimized, care offers a way to politicize dependency and to imagine welfare without totalitarian paternalism. It also enables resistance to be practiced as collective political action that does not require ideological clarity and moral perfection and instead accepts ambivalence and contradiction as something that cannot be avoided. This is especially important in post-socialist societies where unlearning neoliberal hegemony and anti-communist memory is still an ongoing process. In this way, the political grammar of care enables the creation of interstitial subjectivities which collectively rehearse, prefigure and defend alternative futures.

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Adam Lipszyc

Fragile Love, Broken Beauty: New Forms of Subjectivity in Contemporary Polish Prose as the Reverse Side of the Social Struggle

My title is surely too bombastic for my short statement. However this may be, though, I do want to claim that the metamorphoses we have been observing in Polish prose – and this means especially: the prose written by women – over the last 25 years are part of the general cultural and psychosocial change that has been happening in the Polish society and that the immense protests of Women's Strike that we witnessed in 2020 and 2021 were part of the same broad metamorphosis. As I argued some time ago when some of us met in the city of Belgrade, the gist of the change is an attempt to transcend the fratriarchal regime, the rule of the gang of brothers (one gang or another), and the forms of subjectivity that correspond to it. It is still to be explored if fratriarchy is just a projection of patriarchy on the horizontal plane or – as I would suggest – in more recent forms it is a massive defence against the results of the erasure of the symbolic father. My guess is that the current liberal order is a fratriarchal order of that post-patriarchal order, that the populist regimes are viciously and violently grotesque forms of regression to the patriarchal order crystallized around the living clown instead of the safely dead Dad, and so the only chance we have is in going beyond fratriarchy rather than moving back to it. Now, the move failed in the political sphere. True, the protests were clearly one of the key factors in removing Law and Justice from power, but – surprise, surprise – their energy was used, viciously and regressively, to reestablish the old fratriarchal regime rather than to move beyond. I have no answer to how the success could have been stabilized politically. Perhaps we can learn something about it from the Serbian students or from Janek Sowa's Utopia of the democracy of sortition. However this may be, in the literary sphere the transformation does continue successfully, but new tones have set in that require our attention. The newest phenomena in Polish prose, written both by men and women, seem to point to something we have not witnessed so far.

Now, it is debatable if the current explosion of Polish women's prose dates back to, say, 1993 when Olga Tokarczuk published her first book, or

– as I would suggest – to 2002, the date of the debut of Dorota Masłowska. However we date it, the explosion is a fact that can hardly be contested. Importantly, what I mean is not only that women publish more and better stuff, but that they also dominate the scene of Polish prose. This is new. Surely, ever since, say, Narcyza Żmichowska, Poland had its important prose writers. Figures such as Konopnicka, Orzeszkowa, Dąbrowska and Nałkowska have been treated as part of the canon, even if, importantly and significantly, their canonization was largely due to their contribution to the national cause and they were largely ignored by male writers as important points of reference. Apart from that, Polish prose was male business. This business fared better and worse, but it did produce some first rate and very diverse stuff along the way, from Prus and Reymont through Gombrowicz and Schulz down to Lem and Buczkowski, Białoszewski and Lipski.

Now, it is striking that if we look at what happens in Polish prose after 1989, the domination of women's prose becomes evident. Surely, highly gifted writers such as Pilch and Stasiuk were active in this period, but their accomplished prose only illustrates the general tendency of Polish male subject losing his voice. Parodistically, we may say that this subject has been shifting between the macho position and its reverse, that of the lamenting drunk. Two trends should be exempted from this general judgement: the so called 'rural trend', which has been recording the social, cultural and linguistic pains of becoming a subject in the Polish countryside, and the queer literature, especially with its towering figure of Michał Witkowski whose truly revolutionary significance in Polish prose – and as a re-reader of the literary tradition – cannot be underestimated. Beyond that, however, the male voice has been growing weaker.

By contrast, ever since Masłowska's debut at the latest, women's prose has been growing in power. With names such as Bargielska, Murek, Rudzka, Kotas, Łapczyńska, Jelonek, Michalczak, Klicka and many others Polish literature gained brilliant prose voices. Grasping a variety of experiences such as love, desire, friendship, care, mourning, aging, loneliness, illness, miscarriage, rape and many others, they have been inventing new forms of expression and, I would argue, new forms of subjectivity beyond patriarchy. In this prose, slang and neological inventiveness, sarcastic humor and piercing self-irony go hand in hand with the sensitivity for the minute, weak, and passing, the voice of lament is interwoven here with the voice of

protest, the care for fragile forms of community and care go side by side with the gesture of solitary withdrawal, anger against the powerful goes hand in hand with tenderness for the loved ones. Very roughly speaking, in terms of Adriana Cavarero's *Inclinations*, I would suggest that Polish prose has successfully moved from the male I bragging about its own erection or lamenting its deficiency to the self inclined in so many different ways. If we allow ourselves to broaden the scope of this rapid overview and include one gifted poet, Justyna Kulikowska, we would see this combination of protest, lament and tenderness, of fragile love and broken beauty in a nutshell, additionally strengthened in Kulikowska's work by a smart use of a dialect in her attack on various forms of hegemony. However, this short excursion into the land of poetry should also help us notice one more important shift. Until 2002 it were the critics and the poets that dominated Polish culture and language – and, with the notable exceptions of Szymborska and Janion, they were male. Important debates were initiated by literary critics such as Wyka or Błoński, and poets such as Różewicz, Herbert and Miłosz were prompting images, phrases and stances that structured the Polish mind. In recent years, however, this has changed: the prescriptive voice of the male poet has been replaced by the both ironic and tender voice of the female prose writer as the crucial sound that structures Polish culture. This voice does not lecture. It loves, it laughs, it laments – inviting its audience to join it in the process of reinventing what we are and how we are to be with each other.

Now, two important addenda are in place. First, it seems that in the few years something has begun to change in the male prose as well. The very different figures such as Maciej Sieńczyk, Grzegorz Bogdał and, most of all, Mateusz Górniak, show how the move beyond fratriarchal regime, catastrophically and short-sightedly revoked by the ruling coalition within the political sphere, is continuing in the literary field, producing brand new voices in the male prose as well, that are reinventing the male subjectivity, too. However, and this is the second point, the name of Górniak points to what may be a wholly new phenomenon in which he may be accompanied by several other writers such as Karolina Krasny. Górniak's brilliant prose seems to register a strange life of strangely abstract characters moving through strangely abstract, but consistently apocalyptic spaces. It is too soon to jump to conclusions, but I would risk the hypothesis that if the fantastic explosion of women's prose that we have witnessed in the last 25

years has been part of and contributed to the reinvention of what it means to be a subject in Poland, opening, at the same time, paths for thinking in new ways about what it means to live together, the new apocalyptic prose exemplified by Górniak's project may be, much more darkly, preparing us for the time of the residual selves in the times of the catastrophic collapse of social life. True, but it does whatever it can – and it can a lot – to make us capable of feeling the fragile love and appreciate the broken beauty in the time that remains.

Tijana Matijević

Panel Interstitial Subjectivities: Care, Pedagogy, and Resistance in Post-Socialist Capitalist Contexts

DISCUSSANT'S COMMENT

I would say that this panel offered some curious and challenging, if not answers, then takes on the assumptions of our joint research which is clearly not exclusively theory-centred but in a way, it tends to intrude into the practice, to leap into it, analogous to that Benjamin's "[tiger's]-leap into the past"¹, as a critical/dialectical approach to history that disrupts the linear flow of time. Instead of passively documenting the past, this approach urges "reading" past events into the present, enabling a proactive and **political** rewriting of history in times of danger, which our times obviously are. I had this flashback to tiger's leap yesterday, now I must remind of another line of Benjamin's reasoning regarding the past, that is, dealing with the past, which fits well our shared **non-commemorative** interest in the past (as Boris Buden would put it), but interest in the possibility to **actualize** the past. In Benjamin's phrasing: [O]ne could speak of the increasing concentration (integration) of reality, such that everything past (in its time) can acquire a **higher grade of actuality** than it had in the moment of its existing. How it marks itself as higher actuality is **determined by the image as which and in which it is comprehended**. [...] To approach, in this way, 'what has been' means to treat it not historiographically ... **but politically, in political categories**. (Benjamin 2002: 392)². So that *The Fight Continues* – which is the title of our project that further reads *Emancipatory Past and Present-Day Struggles in Central Europe and the Balkans* – is in fact a clear statement on a specific kind of theorizing we are aiming at here. And in this sense this panel maps, describes but also questions and critiques those contemporary sites of possible resistance or possible sites of resistance in the light

1 Benjamin, Walter (1968): "Theses on the Philosophy of History", in: Hannah Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, New York: Schocken Books, 253–264.

2 Benjamin, Walter (2002): "First Sketches. Paris Arcades I", in: Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Cambridge, Massachusetts et al.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 825–868.

of, or as a continuation of, certain past practices or institutional arrangements, but definitely in some sort of communication with the past, or even memory of the past. And at first sight, the contours of those contemporary practices stand like almost **clear opposites** to what had been possible and existing in the socialist period. Now, I am aware that this is a very broad and bold claim, but I do refer to my own research on Yugoslav cultural and intellectual history, and would actually like to focus on a type of affect felt when reading those sources (but also affects ensuing from those texts), something similar to what Raymond Williams dubs **structure of feeling**. This refers to the shared, lived emotional atmosphere of a particular time or social group. So, not something formally written down, it's more like the atmosphere, the blend of emotions, values, and assumptions that aren't fully articulated.³ As I was reading the corpus of works which in fact make a genuine Yugoslav Marxist literary theory, of course completely left out of the canon, and not really recognized as such, I was impressed (I know Srđan shares my thoughts on this) first with a kind of strong present, as a temporality they talk from - it is a kind of *zone of contemporaneity* they position themselves in - and second, a rather sovereign and self-confident authorial position which somehow allowed me to read their proposals as not only a possible but in fact an achieved alternative, cultural, political and other. **Interstitial Subjectivities** describes or tries to capture those interstitial moments, relating to or occupying small spaces, gaps, or intervals between parts of a structure of subjectivities. Do we refer here to those structures of feeling or rather to subjects which are in transition, transitory subjects? As subjects eponymic to the epoch of transition, but also subjects which are temporary, unfinished, undecided? As said, some of the papers are clearly critical towards the possibility of resistance, describing some of the practices as "tools for survival rather than conscious practices of resistance". Authors question the possibility of a successful resistance and even agency in the situation of an ideological vacuum; they write on the lack of ideological platform which makes the resistance cultural (do we define here the culturalization of resistance?) Going back to the implied (temporal, ideological, cultural...) comparison we are addressing through our project, it would be curious to focus on some of the most prominent epithets or descriptions applied in these analyses which are: cracks, in-betweens,

3 Raymond Williams (1977): *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.

invisible, discreet, informal, limitation, ambivalence, gap, residual selves, minute, weak, passing, fragile... (the last few are direct quotes from Adam's paper). Talking about discreet pedagogies, maybe an invisible curriculum, informal spaces and practices of organising, alternative knowledge, ethics of care, the authors map the possible tactics of resistance, but also make us ask ourselves what is contemporary resistance? Are survival strategies *maybe* resistance? For what runs through as a red thread in the presented papers is the issue of ideology – and a lack thereof – and the possibility of resistance; does this lead, as I asked myself in the beginning, to a discursive articulation of a defeat? Or, as Adam put it when writing on contemporary fiction, which "does whatever it can – and it can a lot", to an articulation of new forms of subjectivity as the reverse side of social struggles? He concludes by highlighting precisely the importance of the *structure of feeling*, as literature makes "us capable of feeling", in the sense that it *does* something. This could help see the potentials of the conceptual platform of this panel, which among other things dealt with those structures of feeling that evidence how change is felt before it is fully understood, and possibly also politically articulated to our own benefit.

Jurata, 29 April 2026

Marjan Ivković

Inductive emancipation: the unrealized promise of Yugoslav self-management and Serbia's student-led social movement

Self-management socialism: the emancipatory promise of the past

One key aspect of Yugoslav self-management socialism was, I would argue, a very specific form of pluralism – a pluralism that meant both the endorsement of a plurality of legitimate paths toward socialism globally and of ethnic plurality as a legitimate aspect of socialist society inside Yugoslavia. From the perspective of critical theory, one might understand this aspect of self-management socialism as a principle of *de-totalization*, the overcoming of the capitalist principle of totalization, i.e. its inherent tendency to restructure social reality in such a way that every particular phenomenon in the end gets mediated by the universal logic of valorization. For non-dogmatic Marxists, one important aspect of a post-capitalist social order must be that it should *not be a totality*, it should be a social order that allows for substantive plurality of all kinds, an order that is “neither a system nor a contradiction”, to put it in Adorno’s terms (*Negative Dialectics*, 11). An order that is neither a system nor a contradiction would be one in which there is a plurality of ways that people come together to arrange material reproduction, for example – something that capitalism systematically obstructs.

In my understanding, the project of self-management in Yugoslavia was a project of societal emancipation precisely in this, critical-theoretic sense – a project of establishing a social order that is not a totality. The only way such a society can be created is inductively, through the free, democratic cooperation of producers – as Edvard Kardelj, the principal theorist of self-management argued, “These socialist relationships can come solely as the product of a conscious and elemental economic, social and other activity and practice of working men who are striving, creating, reasoning and building in the *conditions of social ownership of the instruments of production*; men whom that activity is *bringing into new relationships*” (Kardelj, 1955: 15). This is a process in which people gradually emancipate themselves from capitalism in a completely open-ended manner, there is no blueprint to be

followed, only a general “enabling framework” that establishes the conditions for the free cooperation of producers – the institutional system of self-management. Yugoslavia also had considerable central economic planning, but it was not totalizing, there was a significant market component, especially after the reform of 1965 – there was even strong competition on the market between socially owned, self-managed enterprises, and this was defended by theorists such as Kardelj as an integral aspect of self-management, not a transitional strategy. Competition on the market, including the profit motive, was, according to this perspective, important for the motivation and creativity of self-managed workers, because, unlike in capitalism, the profits (the ‘surplus’) was to be invested in the enterprise in accordance with the workers’ interests, since they are the ones who make all the important decisions in a direct-democratic manner, through workers’ assemblies.

Another important characteristic of this vision of emancipation, which also brings it close to the perspective of first-generation critical theory, is that it does not strive toward *eliminating negativity* from society. Capitalism, on the critical-theoretic account, is defined by a fundamental negativity, that of the mediation of particular, concrete phenomena by that which they are not – by the abstract logic of value, i.e. by money as the universal equivalent. This negativity is crosscut (and, in fact, underpinned) by another one, the fundamental class antagonism that defines capitalism. Most conventional conceptions of socialism, including traditional-Marxist ones, define it along the lines of overcoming capitalist negativity in the sense of eradicating negativity *as such*. In conventional conceptions, a socialist society is one in which direct-democratic decision making about questions of collective life, including democratic planning of material reproduction, assumes the shape of positivity: there is a relation of immediacy between collective decision making and social reproduction – the satisfaction of human needs and flourishing of all producers – and one could argue that this vision carries eschatological overtones, in spite of the fact that Marx defined socialism as the “end of the prehistory of man”, the beginning of a true historical dynamic not confined by the logic of capital, i.e. of a substantive plurality of logics of social action. The Yugoslav self-management vision of socialism, on the other hand, endorsed negativity within social reality as a constituent component:

The utopian idea of establishing a static and conflict-free system of ideal socio-economic and democratic institutions and relations among people has never been the driving force behind the development of Yugoslav society on the grounds of self-management forms of socialist productive relations. A socialist society, and that includes the society of socialist self-management, is not a society without contradictions and conflicts of interest in the social structure although, regarded over the long term, it reduces and removes class and other antagonisms (Kardelj, 1976: 105).

The market component of self-management should be understood against the background of this conception of socialism – it was an aspect of *legitimate negativity* within socialist society, a form of social mediation, that could, once it was stripped of its totalizing logic within capitalism, mediate between collective decision-making and social reproduction in a beneficial way, fostering the initiative and creativity of self-managed workers. This was a “negative” mediation in the sense that market logic always is – it equates incommensurable concrete phenomena by way of jointly relating them to that which they are not, the abstract logic of value, i.e. money. Market socialism has been subjected to acute and convincing criticisms, which argue, for example, that once there is market logic within a social order, even if it is not totalizing, this will inevitably lead to the reproduction of forms of capitalist subjectivity based on individualism, competitiveness and self-interest (see Lebowitz 2010). Michael Lebowitz even cites Yugoslavia as a clear example of this problem, and he is in principle correct – especially when we take into account the fact that, while the role of the market was very real in Yugoslav economy, economic democracy that should have transformed it into a beneficial force was to a significant extent only nominal. But what is important for our purposes is that, precisely at the nominal level, the logic of market competition between self-managed enterprises can be seen as part of the *unrealized emancipatory promise* of Yugoslav socialism. This emancipatory promise rested on the conviction that both the road toward building socialism and socialist society itself – once it has been fully established – required, to a significant extent, that social action be integrated through uncoerced, negatively mediated interplay of particularities which, by way of this interplay, mutually transform each other. The formation of a post-capitalist and post-ethnic common subjectivity could, on this account, only emerge the mutual engagement of existing forms of subjectivity.

The same logic, I would argue, applies to the inter-ethnic relations of Yugoslavia (relations between the six Yugoslav "nationalities" and the large ethnic minorities such as Albanians and Hungarians). These groups were treated as legitimate "subjects" of socialist society, as Tito made clear in his speech at the 8th Congress of the League of Communists: "Internationalism in one's own country does not mean unification, does not mean negation of nationalities and ethnic groups as subjects in a socialist community" (Tito, 1964: 37). A supra-ethnic Yugoslav national identity was also supposed to evolve inductively, through the interplay of ethnic groups which could in principle involve a dimension of competition, especially when coupled with the role of the market – there was, for example, a significant degree of competitiveness between the same types of enterprises in the different federal republics of Yugoslavia, grounded, at least in part, in a sense of ethnic belonging (see Ivković, Petrović-Trifunović and Prodanović, 2019). I would argue that this view of ethnic groups as "subjects in a socialist community" implies a processual logic, in line with the understanding of socialism itself as a regulative ideal one can only approach asymptotically: these groups in socialism should also be in an open-ended process of self-transformation, which results from their constant interaction, including competitive forms of interaction.

It has, of course, been convincingly argued many times that it was precisely these characteristics of Yugoslav socialism that set up the conditions for the country's eventual demise, especially in the context of prolonged economic crisis of the 1980s, when productive competitiveness easily turned into open antagonism. But, once again, there was a specific emancipatory promise that subtended these characteristics, not so much a vision as an inchoate sense that pervaded everyday life (as it became ever more permeated by the conceptual vocabulary of self-management) that emancipation means the mutual engagement of different social groups that opens each one of them to self-transformation. It also means acknowledging, already in the present, that these group identities are less rigid than it may seem – that they are, in Adornian terms, "self-non-identical" – which makes them capable of mutually opening themselves up to being transformed. This is what I see as the core of self-management's unrealized promise, one that overflowed the boundaries of the official ideology and that the ordinary Yugoslav people at the time had a predominantly intuitive understanding of, but which nevertheless contributed significantly to the legitimacy of the

order. The promise has, in my view, survived the passing of self-management and Yugoslavia, and exists (in Serbia at least) in the form of sedimented, pre-discursive collective awareness of the self-non-identical nature of existing forms of subjectivity as the necessary starting point for real social change.

Serbia's student-led social movement: the promise reactivated

The most explicit and easily identifiable parallel between Serbia's student-led social movement and Yugoslav self-management socialism is the decentralized, direct-democratic organization of the movement structured around student plenums (and later on also the informal civic councils formed in their image) reminiscent of the workers' assemblies of socialist Yugoslavia. The movement has, since its inception, invoked direct democracy as the key principle of self-legitimization, which was an important factor in its huge success in mobilizing Serbian citizens against the authoritarian-neoliberal regime of the Serbian Progressive Party. And while the movement has not explicitly referenced self-management or the 1968 student rebellion (as it strives to mobilize citizens across the ideological spectrum), it is obviously relying on the overwhelmingly positive attitude of most Serbian citizens toward this legacy.

The elemental unit of the movement is the student plenum of an individual faculty within each of the country's five state universities (Belgrade, Novi Sad, Niš, Kragujevac, Novi Pazar), and, from November 2024 to September 2025, the plenums operated within the material context of the students' occupation of their faculties, which effectively stopped university life for almost a year. There are complex mechanisms for integrating plenums in a non-hierarchical way, first at the level of each of the five universities, and ultimately at the level of Serbia as a whole (the "High Meeting of the Delegates" from each university). This delicate structure is also explicitly reminiscent of Yugoslavia's notoriously complex institutional mechanisms designed to minimize centralization, especially in the aftermath of the adoption of the 1974 Constitution, which effectively transformed the country into a confederation and is often treated as one of the key factors contributing to the country's disintegration.

But there is, I would argue, also an even more implicit and arguably

more substantive way in which the movement is drawing upon the legacy of self-management: it is not only anchoring itself in the official aspects of this legacy such as the institutional structure of Yugoslavia and direct democracy in the workplace, but also in the deep sediments of the unrealized emancipatory promise of this social order as I have outlined it above. This anchoring manifests itself not so much in the structure and functioning of the movement defined by clear procedures, but rather at the discursive level, more precisely the level of the movement's self-understanding and communication with the broader public in relation to the frequent internal tensions within and between its constitutive units, that result from the heterogeneity of students in terms of identity and political orientation.

Looking at the discourse of the movement as it has taken shape across its official channels of communication over the past year and a half, the dominant discursive strategy for treating conflicts, divisions and heterogeneity within the movement has been to frame them as sources of strength rather than weakness, and this includes an image of the movement as capable of growing and evolving through these very phenomena, through the mutual engagement – even, or perhaps especially, the conflict-ridden forms of this engagement – of its different constituent groups, which results in their own self-transformation. And while this peculiar self-understanding certainly applies to the movement's discourse surrounding the relations between all kinds of ideological groups inside of it, perhaps the clearest example is the discursive framing of the relationship between the ethnically predominantly Bosniak students from the University of Novi Pazar and the predominantly Serb students from the other four universities, especially the ones leaning toward Serbian ethnic nationalism. The newfound solidarity and sense of brotherhood between the Bosniak and Serbs students has been the subject of huge enthusiasm within the movement and the broader anti-regime public, but there is also a strong element of the logic of inductive emancipation within the discourse surrounding these relations – a sense that the mutual engagement of these groups, even some instances of tension and misunderstanding between them, enable a (progressive kind of) self-transformation and mutual learning within the broader emancipatory struggle of Serbia's citizenry.

André Thiemann

Raspberry mobilizations: workers' self-management as a resource for social struggles?

Over the last forty years, Serbia has seen waves of mobilization from the right, left and center, from the Anti-Bureaucratic Revolution of 1987-88 to the Otpor mobilizations of 1998-9 to recent mobilizations to defend life as such, including anti-lithium-mining protests, fights against small hydro-electric power dams, and the demonstrations following the Novi Sad tragedy on 1 November 2024. While not all mobilizations engage directly with the legacy of self-managed socialism, many rely on its infrastructures, concepts, and practices, as I demonstrate with the case of the raspberry farmers' demonstrations in southwestern Serbia. Founded in 1997, the raspberry farmers association "Willamette" has a self-government structure and fights, inter alia, to raise the yearly account-price for raspberries, i.e., the minimum price that cold store owners guarantee before the harvest (a remnant of the production contracts with smallholders established by the socialist municipal joint cooperative "Jedinstvo" Arilje). As I observed in 2023, associational meetings take place in the House of Culture (Sokolski dom), and the members call on the state to mediate their relationship to cold store owners, lest they escalate their mobilizations and join that years' nation-wide "Serbia Against Violence" demonstrations. The farmers' calls are rarely fully met by the state and, following a series of escalations and bluffs, this may lead to clashes with the police, where new generations of farmers "feel the state on their skin" and "become militant subjects" (see Razsa 2015). If we scratch beneath the surface of nationally concerned rhetoric, these mobilizations hark back to the locally very successful socialist entwining of the peasant mode of production with the self-managed cooperative sector, through mutually beneficial contracts and agronomic extension services concerning raspberries. That Arilje's smallholders turned into "raspberry people" (*malinari*) is in no small amount due to the initiative of Dr. Svetislav Petrović, Jedinstvo's long-term Director (1975-1990), who was a former socialist state functionary, a trained agronomist, and the son of smallholders from an Ariljan mountain village.



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